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Viewing cable 07BAGHDAD89, KURDISTAN PRESIDENT BARZANI DISCUSSES PKK, KIRKUK

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BAGHDAD89	2007-01-10 10:49	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Baghdad

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000089

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/10/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: KURDISTAN PRESIDENT BARZANI DISCUSSES PKK, KIRKUK

REF: A. BAGHDAD 0053 B. BAGHDAD 0070

(U) Classified By: Regional Coordinator James Yellin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. This is an Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

¶2. (C) Summary: U.S. Regional Coordinator for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region asked Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani to close all Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) offices and refuse safe haven to its members in a meeting on December 29, 2006. Barzani did not answer directly, but said that he would remain neutral in an armed conflict between Turkey and the PKK and that he would consider naming the PKK as a terrorist organization if it resorted to violence. Barzani also reiterated his strong opposition to any delay in the referendum on the status of Kirkuk. But he said that he felt Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Iraqi Minister of Justice Hisham al-Shibli are both committed to carrying out the referendum.

¶3. (C) Comment: In September Barzani pressured the PKK to declare a unilateral ceasefire with Turkey and the KRG continues to seek Turkish investment in the Kurdistan Region,s oil sector. The willingness Barzani expressed in the meeting to deny support to the PKK may further signal an opportunity for progress in the relationship between the KRG and Turkey. End Summary.

KRG TO "REMAIN NEUTRAL" IN CONFLICT BETWEEN TURKEY AND PKK

¶4. (C) Regional Coordinator and RRT Officers met with Barzani on December 29, 2006, at his palace in Salah ad-Din and discussed the PKK. (Note: the PKK operates in southeastern Turkey and along the Iraqi border with the stated aim of creating an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey. The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in September 2006, but Turkey rejected the move, saying it would not negotiate with a terrorist organization. End Note.) Regional Coordinator told Barzani that the U.S. considers the PKK a terrorist organization and called on Barzani and the KRG to close all PKK offices and refuse a safe haven to PKK members. Without answering directly Barzani said he does not agree with the tactics of the PKK, but he characterized the actions taken against the Kurds by Turkey as "state terrorism" and as equally as bad as any terrorism by the PKK. He said the KRG is prepared to cooperate with Turkey if it will adopt a "peaceful and democratic solution" to its conflict, but Turkey must recognize "the facts on the ground" and recognize the rights of the Kurdish people in the region. If Turkey only has a military solution to the conflict, the KRG will "remain neutral" between Turkey and the PKK. He said, "The ball is in Turkey,s court."

¶5. (C) Regional Coordinator asked if the KRG would declare the PKK a terrorist organization if it resorts to violence against Turkey again. Barzani said yes, but the KRG and Turkey disagree on the definition of terrorism. He said Turkey did not respond positively to the ceasefire and still regularly shells the area along the Iraqi Kurdistan border on the pretext of routing out the PKK. The villages located along the border are remote and the KRG is not able to rebuild them or provide assistance. Shelling these villages is "a provocative act." He added that "We morally support the PKK in a peaceful approach."

¶6. (C) Regional Coordinator asked about the status of the Makhmour refugee camp, a UNHCR administered camp in Ninewah province just across the border from the Kurdistan Region. The camp houses nearly 10,000 Kurdish refugees from Turkey. Barzani said that the KRG would provide assistance to UNHCR, but would not allow any refugees in the camp to be integrated into the local community. After the UN-led registration and repatriation process is completed, he said, any remaining refugees must continue to be housed by UNHCR in the camp.

KIRKUK REFERENDUM ON TRACK WITH IRAQI LEADERS

¶7. (C) Regional Coordinator asked if Barzani had reached agreement on how to move forward on the implementation of Iraqi Constitution Article 140, which specifies that there should be a referendum in Kirkuk by the end of 2007 to decide if the oil-rich city will become part of the Kurdistan region. Barzani responded that he had met with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and Iraqi Minister of Justice Hashim al-Shibli and believes that both of them are committed to the implementation of Article 140. All parties agreed to resolve the issue peacefully and constitutionally. The Kurdish people have been patient and are now waiting for the implementation of Article 140, he said. "Any subjugation to the pressures of Turkey will be catastrophic."

¶8. (C) Comment: Barzani's statement that the KRG will remain neutral in a conflict between the PKK and Turkey and his willingness to consider naming them as a terrorist organization under certain conditions suggests that he may be placing an increased value he on a long-term economic relationship with Turkey. In September Barzani pressured the PKK to declare a unilateral ceasefire. In addition, KRG officials have said they prefer Turkish firms for oil development in the region.

¶9. (C) Comment (continued): The status of Kirkuk is a fundamental political and economic issue for the KRG. The area around the city contains among the richest oil fields in Iraq, and many Kurds say that the city, once annexed, should be the capitol of the KRG or of an eventual independent Kurdish state. The Arabization campaign in the 1980s and 1990s has been countered by a KRG-sponsored resettlement of Kurds in the city in preparation for the referendum. The KRG believes it would win if a referendum were held by the end of ¶2007.

¶10. (C) Comment (continued): Barzani believes that Maliki and Shibli are inclined to support implementation of the referendum as called for in Article 140. However, Barzani also fears that U.S. ties to Turkey could cause us to support a delay of the referendum. For Barzani, the Iraq Study Group recommendation to delay the referendum is emblematic of the lack of U.S. commitment to the referendum.
KHALILZAD